

THE BERGDAHL BURDEN: ANALYZING THE COMMUNICATION OF THE U.S. MILITARY AS A HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION

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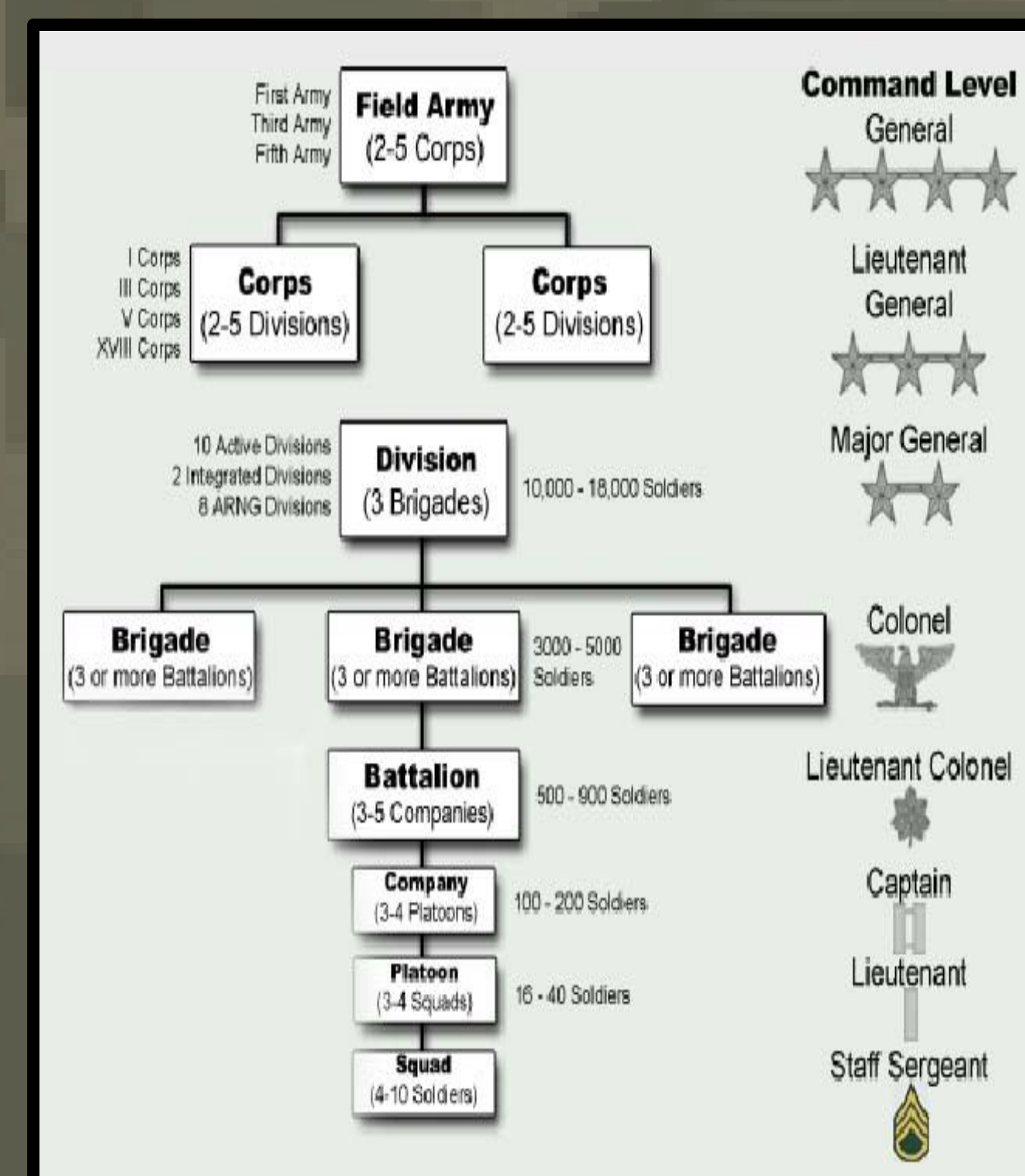


INTRODUCTION

The military may be thought of as a High Reliability Organization (Rochlin, 1993). Superior-subordinate communication is one major factor in HROs and crisis detection. Leadership Communication Management (LMX) and Attribution Theory can help explain why this communication pathway sometimes fails and causes crisis situations. Rosenthal's (2003) processual approach to crises enables us to view the crisis in full context around a triggering event or "temporal disjunction [which] call[s] for a transition (Roux-Dufort, 2007).



MODEL OF THE MILITARY



Command and control model (Drabek and McEntire, 2003)

Top-down and centralized power (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013)

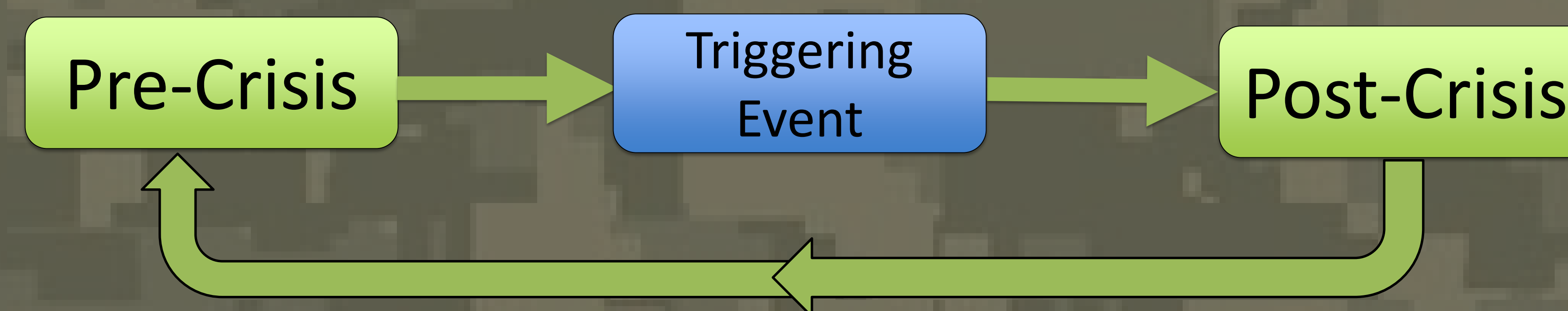
METHODS

After listening to the Podcast *Serial*, we applied HRO team communication theory, LMX, and attribution theory to the military. We sought to examine the communication pathway between superiors and subordinates to determine future crisis prevention.



ABSTRACT

The Bowe Bergdahl case should be evaluated through the lens of the processual approach of crisis communication. Bergdahl's case was the triggering event calling for a transition in superior-subordinate communication in the military. It is important to examine the full context within which this crisis event occurred. Therefore, we analyzed the military through the lens of HRO team communication (Jahn & Black, 2017) before applying Leadership Communication Management (Liden, Sparrow, & Wayne, 1997) and Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1972).



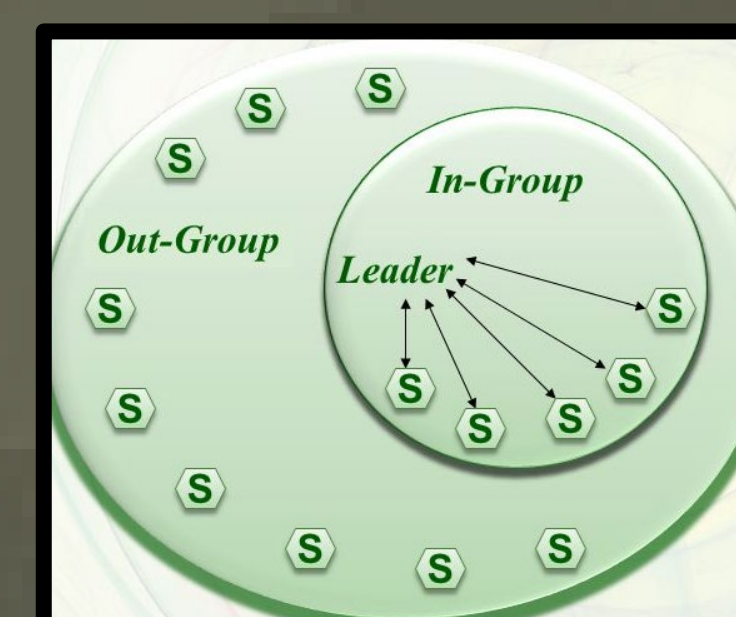
RESULTS

During the Bowe Bergdahl case, the military was not engaged in HRO team communication practices.

Without this communication, subordinates may not feel comfortable bringing up signs or signals of potential crisis situations.

HRO TEAM COMMUNICATION	NOT PRESENT	PRESENT
Supervisor Inclusive Communication	X	
Cross-Level Facilitation	X	
Respectful Interrelating	X	
Learning Communication	X	

But why is there this lack of HRO team communication strategies?



LMX indicates military superiors make up the in-group while their subordinates make up the out-group. Such centralization diminishes high-quality relationships from forming.

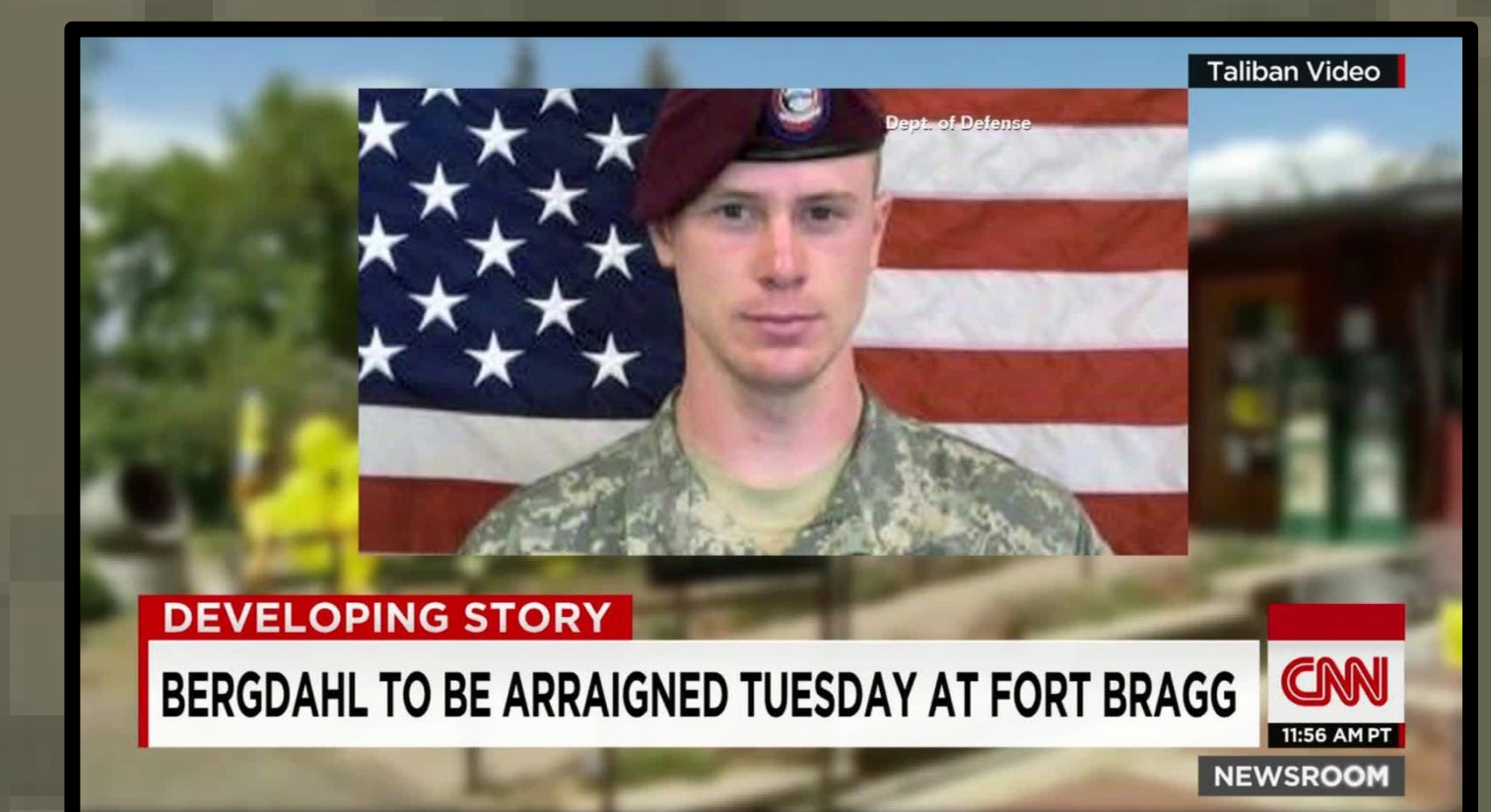
Attribution theory reveals these in-group/out-group relationships persist because of external and internal attribution. Those in the in-group (superior) are more knowledgeable, more competent, and more authoritative. Those in the out-group (subordinates) are less knowledgeable, less competent, and less authoritative.

DISCUSSION

The processual approach to crisis communication pinpoints Bowe Bergdahl's situation as a triggering event and puts the situation into context.

The military as an HRO does not effectively employ HRO team communication.

Such a lack in communication climate building may be due to the current leadership structure and the strong differences in attributions for the "in-group" and the "out-group."



FUTURE RESEARCH

LMX and Attribution Theory help us understand superior-subordinate communication and the quality (high or low) of their relationships.

Future research should:

- Conduct empirical studies to investigate the impact of high/low quality supervisor-subordinate relationships in HROs.
- Determine the effect attribution theory plays in constructing organizational roles.

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